

MINUTES
UNITED TENNESSEE VETERANS ASSOCIATION (UTVA)
June 5, 2012

REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT

Travis Kraft, Associate Director, VA Regional Office, Nashville
Ed Harries, Executive Director, TN State Veterans Homes
, VA Memphis Medical Center
Juan Morales, Director, VA TN Valley Healthcare System
Charlene Ehret, Director, MT. Home VA Medical Center
Randy Ammons, Operation Stand Down Nashville, Inc.
Vicky Kendricks, Deputy Network Director, VISN 9 Network

UTVA MEMBERS PRESENT

Mary Lee Fielder: American Ex-Prisoners of War
George Martin: AMVETS
Frank Forbes: Disabled American Veterans
Bill Crawford and John Furgess: Veterans of Foreign Wars
Ralph Land: Vietnam Veterans of America
Kathy Bell: Women Veterans of America
Perry Roberts: American Legion
Barbara Roberts: American Legion Auxiliary
Fred Poe: Air Force Sergeants Association
Deanne Poe: Air Force Sergeants Association Auxiliary
Inda Adams, M. Alice Blackford: Marine Corps Auxiliary

TDVA STAFF PRESENT

Many-Bears Grinder, Commissioner
Wendell Cheek, Deputy Commissioner
Yvette Martinez, Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Communications
Roger Harrell, Director of Claims
Julie Cyr, Legislative Liaison

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Grinder called the meeting to order at 13:05pm.

PROCEEDINGS

Commissioner Grinder completed roll call of all organizations present. She called on Mary Lee Fielder to give the invocation and Kathy Bell to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Grinder asked for approval of minutes from the last UTVA meeting on March 5, 2012. Bill Crawford made a motion to approve the minutes and John Furgess seconded the motion. The vote to approve minutes was unanimous.

BRIEFINGS

VA Medical Center, Mountain Home: Commissioner Grinder called on Charlene Ehret, Director for Mountain Home Medical Center, to report. Director Ehret introduced the new Associate Director of the hospital Dan Snyder. Please see attached report for information.

Questions:

Bill Crawford, VFW: Have you seen any study at all about any kind of fail-safe/ back-up position for the National healthcare issue? Director Ehret: Very little information has been stated about this. We like to ensure we are open to all Veterans and hopefully families.

VA Medical Center, Memphis – Commissioner Grinder called on a representative from Memphis VA Medical facility to give their report. Please see attached report for information.

VISN 9 Network: Vicky Kendricks, Deputy Network Director stated that the budget is one issue we watch closely. In 2012 we had a slight increase in the budget. We are happy to report that the leadership within the facilities is helping to continue to provide the best services to our Veterans in the most cost effective way. Please see attached information on the VISN 9 Network area.

TN Valley Healthcare Systems – Commissioner Grinder called on Director Juan Morales to brief on the Tennessee Valley HealthCare Systems Medical Centers. Please see attached report for information.

Questions:

Ralph Land, Vietnam Veterans of America: Is the PTSD Group thing going on in Nashville and will that be continuing? Director Morales stated, yes the groups will continue be in Nashville at the same days and locations. One thing about PTSD is that we have learned over time that now the VA is in a better position to do these things. Only change will be how they will approach their groups and will add a buddy system to help them out.

Ralph Land, Vietnam Veterans of America: What is our current wait time for our patients getting into the system? Director Morales stated we have a wait list currently but I do not have the specifics. Primary care has 13 vacant positions that we are currently recruiting for.

Bill Crawford, Veterans of Foreign Wars: What is the difficulty with filling these vacant positions? Is it the salary? Director Morales stated let's talk about mental health, currently a lot of competition exists since it is a big issue across the country. Incentives are given to attract providers and sometimes we do not have that capability.

VA Regional Office, Nashville – Commissioner Grinder introduced Travis Kraft, Acting Director for the VARO. Mr. Kraft introduced Angela Jaquies as the new Veterans Service Center Manager. The Regional Office's new director, Edna McDonald will report on on July 30th. She will bring a wealth of knowledge to the department. We continue to have an extremely good relationship

with the VHA. We work together a lot with the homeless arena and service members coming out of active duty. We process those claims right away. We will be sending one day a week a rating specialist to the hospital to help answer questions. We will be adding 12 more rating specialists by end of this year to make things work a little bit smoother and process claims timely. We started the year with 13,000 claims pending. We are at 11,000 claims just a few under our target. Our rating accuracy is doing well but not great. We are above national average at 92% but we need to continue to get better to serve the Veterans who are waiting for their decisions. Goal is to get to 96% by 2015. Another area we are pleased but not satisfied is the timeliness of our claims. Claims' pending over 125 days is 35%. This is too high but we are still under national average of 66%. Our average day of pending claims is 139.1 and the national average is 237.0. We are presently having claims less than 6 months at 173.9 and the national average is 250.

Questions:

Bill Crawford, VFW: If we are picking up an extra 1,000 claims with us pending at 139 days what will happen to our other claims? Travis Kraft stated, yes we will be adding claims but they will be brand new claims. I will tell you that we are not going to allow TN Veterans to suffer as a result of this.

State Veterans Homes – Commissioner Grinder introduced Ed Harries, Director of the State Veterans Homes. Please see attached document for information.

Operation Stand Down Nashville, Inc.: Commissioner Grinder introduced Randy Ammons with OSDN. Please see attached report for information.

VETERANS ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS

Commissioner Grinder called on each Veteran Organization for reports. (See attached reports on Disabled American Veterans, American Ex-Prisoners of War, American Legion, VFW, AMVETS, Women Veterans of America, and WAVES National.)

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT

Articles of Agreement were signed by organizations present. We will continue at each meeting until all organizations have signed it.

TDVA Business

Commissioner Grinder stated that the TDVA has co-located the offices with Department of Labor Career Centers. This will assist with making things convenient for the Veteran. This will help ensure if we are conducting Community Outreaches there is still someone available both to take a message and double up. We are working with all of the Medical Directors and County Executives/County Mayors adding CSO's to their areas to help assist putting us into their plan for office space. I was fortunate enough to go on the WWII Honor Flight to be a guardian for 3 Veterans. It is an event that changes their lives but I never realized how it would change mine. One of my 3 Veterans I was guardian for turned 90 a few days after the flight and passed away last week. His family contacted me and told me that he talked about that flight up to his last day. Memorial Day was a busy time but it is a way to pay honor to the family members of these who have fallen. I know there is a lot of work that goes into these programs and I want you to know that we appreciate it. The Governor had his Memorial Ceremony last week and this was the first time that all families of the fallen over the past year were represented. The families had personal time with the Governor and received a special presentation for each fallen family member. Speaking of the Fallen, last year legislation as passed for the Fallen Heroes Medal. We have presented 4 medals to date. There have been a few questions about this bill asking if it could be retroactive and it is not authorized; which is why we have only had 4 to date. The Women Veterans Summit had 148 women attend. We had all types of women veterans. We had the oldest woman Veteran, Mrs. Rhodes at 101 and honored the woman who had the longest years in service and the one who just got out. These women were honored for their service and everyone heard great speakers. We are already to start planning for next year to make this a 2 day event. Don Smith was called by Senator Corker's Committee asking about Aid and Attendance benefits. After his 2 hour conversation he was asked to provide testimony. We are happy to get the word out there so that companies do not take advantage of our Veterans. This

is not illegal but it is immoral and despicable. We hope Don's testimony will help put a stop to this.

Wendell Cheek, Deputy Commissioner: We currently have submitted for an Operation and Maintenance grant for Middle TN VA Cemetery to finalize the raising, realigning, and cleaning of their headstones. After this O&M we will be requesting the entire Cemeteries through for one cleaning job as needed. We also have 3 expansion grants we are applying for to add irrigation, Crypts, Columbariums and Kiosks to all Cemeteries. The Jackson Cemetery Grant is currently applied for but on hold. The steering committee is working to find land and hopefully get it donated. The current O&M grants are for Middle TN and West TN to raise, realign and clean headstones.

Julie Cyr, Legislative Liaison: Currently Legislation was closed and we have 3 bills that we wanted to mention. The TEAM ACT, a system to establish a process that will attract, select, retain and promote the best applicants and employees based on performance and equal opportunities. Please see attached fact sheet to see how this bill affects Veterans in a positive way. The Veterans court bill and Handgun permits are two bills that were sent to a summer study and will be addressed next year.

Yvette Martinez, Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Communication: Yvette gave an overview of the Departments website and what is available on twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Please visit our website at www.tn.gov/veteran.

Roger Harrell, Director of Claims TDVA: It looks like travel boards will be going away over the next few years for cost effective for the VA but that will be a few years. Currently if you have filed a DRO after you have done a NOD then you are in a 12-18 month wait. Traditional can be done within 6 months so we look at if people have filed a DRO so that we can contact them and see if they want to transfer that into a Traditional. We can get them done faster and it is better for the Veteran. Video Hearings are currently at 6-9 months and travel boards are at 12-24 months to get those done.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

NEXT MEETINGS

Commissioner mentioned that the next meeting will be the day after Labor Day and if anyone would like to move that to Wednesday. It was agreed upon to stay with September 4th.

September 4, 2012 and December 4, 2012

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by William Crawford to adjourn and was seconded by Mary Lee Fielder. Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m.

Many-Bears Grinder, Executive Officer
United Tennessee Veterans Association

Date